

NOAA Ship:

Date: 03 August 2006

Time: 1500Z

Location: 50NM southeast of Cape Fear, NC

Depth: 140 feet , 85 degrees

Weather: wind - 15-20 kts @ 235 degrees, seas 2-3, swells 4' @ 225 degrees

Platform: 5.5M AMBAR Jet Boat

Event: Man Overboard during small boat recovery

Individual: Small boat coxswain

Coxswain's Status: Uninjured

Damage: None

On any given day during small boat operations, XXX deploys two to four small boats (5.5 meters to 8.5 meters) for diving operations. Routinely, four to six dive operations occur daily requiring the deployment and recovery of small boats between each dive operation. Diving operations occur from near shore to 70 miles offshore. Three of the four boats are deployed/recovered using a single point lift with a knuckleboom or fixed boom crane. The fourth boat (rescue boat) uses a davit configuration. Today's event involved a single point lift with the knuckleboom crane where a small boat was being recovered on the starboard aft side of the ship. Using a single point lift in less than ideal conditions can be extremely treacherous when offshore conditions begin to deteriorate. During deployment and recovery of small boats, when any sea or swell is apparent, XXX mode of operation involves steaming into the sea, turning the ship toward the side that the small boat will be deployed/recovered thereby sweeping the sea on the side that the boat is to be deployed/recovered, and then with a slow bell and following seas on the quarter/stern opposite the side of the small boat to be deployed/recovered, deploy/recover the small boat.

During today's recovery event, the coxswain had come alongside the ship following all precautions and procedures as outlined above. All personnel were in place aboard the ship awaiting recovery of the small boat - crane operator, bow and stern line handlers, officer on deck to oversee operations, CO on the bridge wing at propulsion controls. The sweep had just been performed and a lee was created for the small boat to come alongside. A slow bell was ensured by using the port z-drive, running with the seas on the port quarter, and the embarkation ladder was dropped to the water's edge. The small boat came alongside the starboard side, lines were passed, the safety diver disembarked, the headache ball was lowered and the coxswain hooked up the bridle while standing on the outboard side of the small boat signaling he was ready for pick-up...

Just as the boat was being hoisted out of the water, a swell hit the port quarter. The small boat bumped against the ship and the coxswain was propelled backwards out of the small boat in a matter of one to two seconds. Propulsion was immediately stopped and a life ring was tossed (by the bow line handler) within seconds, while the man overboard alarm was sounded followed by an announcement. With the life ring (with line) and coxswain at the transom of the ship, the stern line handler boarded the small boat. The small boat was deployed and the coxswain was recovered, without injury, within two minutes of falling overboard. The decision was made to let the coxswain drift aft and away from the

ship as opposed to being pulled forward and toward the hull. This avoided the coxswain from being potentially injured where the side and stern of the ship were slapping from the seas and swells.

The coxswain was wearing a USCG approved, red MUSTANG inflatable PFD with a manual inflation and automatic backup, model MD 3031. Immediately upon falling in the water and being submerged, the PFD inflated and uprighted the coxswain above the water. Amazingly enough, the coxswain lost his hard hat, but as he was propelled out of the boat backwards, he covered his face with both hands and saved his glasses. Kudos to Doug Friske and Doug Smith for procuring these vests for the ship.

Lesson learned: One hand (at least) for yourself ...one hand for the ship. When the coxswain hooked up the bridle to the headache ball, for just a split second he did not hold on to the bridle, nor railing, nor was he sitting down yet. That split second made the difference of being in or out of the boat.